

## **PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION**

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**Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in July 2000**

### **UNION STATION**

**210 S. CANAL STREET**

**Date: 1913-1925**

**Architects: Graham, Anderson, Probst and White**  
**(successor firm to Graham, Burnham and Company)**

#### **HISTORY**

Union Station was conceived and executed as part of Daniel Hudson Burnham's 1909 Chicago Plan which called for three major projects in the development of the Near West Side: a modern consolidated railroad terminal, a new post office, and the straightening of an awkward bend in the South Branch of the Chicago River. Built at a total cost of approximately \$65 million, Union Station was funded by a consortium that included the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, and Chicago; the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis; the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy; and the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific railroad companies. Begun in 1913 and completed in 1925, the Union Station project was hailed as an outstanding achievement of railroad facility planning. The architectural firm responsible for this complex but unified design was Graham, Burnham and Company that, upon its dissolution in 1917, was succeeded by the firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White.

The overall scheme included a number of diverse components that the architects skillfully integrated into an organized and efficient design. Occupying the entire block on the west side of Canal Street between Adams and Jackson was an enormous headhouse where passenger conveniences such as waiting rooms, restaurants, restrooms, etc. were located. Wholly separate on the east side of Canal Street was the concourse building (demolished in 1969). Joining the two principal buildings under the street was a broad connecting passage that provided additional space for ticket offices, baggage checking, and telephone and telegraph centers. An intricate system for the handling of mail, freight, and baggage was incorporated into the track-platform areas. At the rear area of the headhouse was a broad vehicular drive opening onto cab stands. This feature permitted traffic to flow in a continuous pattern from the entrance at Clinton and Adams to the exit at Clinton and Jackson.

Architectural historian Carl Condit has written of the station: "The whole vast system of tracks, concourses, platforms, ramps, stairs, entrances, vehicular drives, ticket offices, waiting rooms, dining rooms, and all the subsidiary facilities constitutes a planning masterpiece that has few serious competitors among the stations, piers, and airports of the United States."

In terms of architectural style, Union Station is an interesting combination of severe Neo-Classicism on the exterior and the more elaborate Beaux-Arts classicism on the interior. Both these styles flourished concurrently in the United States from approximately 1890 to 1920 and were most often applied to civic and public buildings such as banks, museums, libraries, department stores, and railroad stations. Both styles employ elements of the classical architecture of Greece and Rome, but do so in different ways. The more austere Neo-Classicism employs large-scale classical elements in their simplest forms to create an effect of rigorous monumentality. Beaux-Arts classicism, on the other hand, employs more intricate classical forms and extensive ornamentation to create a richer, more sumptuous effect.

## DESCRIPTION

The Union Station headhouse is basically a limestone-sheathed, eight-story structure, measuring 319 feet, 10 inches by 372 feet, that occupies a full city block. Its overall appearance as a conventional office block, however, is belied by the massive colonnade on the Canal Street facade and the two broad entrances on the Adams Street and Jackson Boulevard sides. The hallmark of Neo-Classicism is apparent in the orderly row of large, unfluted, smooth-stone columns with unadorned capitals and bases. Above the colonnade is a projecting cornice and a simply treated entablature. The north and south corners are strongly marked by arched openings. A large clock, with roman numerals, convenient for travelers, is set in an incised panel above the arches. The office structure, recessed slightly, rises five stories from the base and is a symmetrical 19-bay structure with windows divided into four lights each. Classical details are evident in the upper portion of the building as well.

The main public porticos on Jackson Boulevard and Adams Street open into spacious lobbies that form balconies above the main waiting room. These balcony-lobbies afford a panoramic view of the main waiting room, a classic example of the Beaux-Arts interior style. Most prevalent in Chicago between the world's fairs of 1893 and 1933, Beaux-Arts classicism was based largely on the theory of design promulgated by the famed Parisian school of architecture, L'Ecole des Beaux-Arts, where legions of American architects were first trained. Employing symmetrical plans, Beaux-Arts classicism was distinguished by large and grandiose compositions enriched with a wealth of detail and decoration. Visually the effect was painterly as well as architectonic.

The main waiting room lies under a vaulted skylight of glass set in steel ribs that measure 112 feet at their highest point. At the base of the vault is a coffered cornice inset with sculptured rosette medallions. This vast rectangular space is enclosed by colossal fluted Corinthian columns with gilded capitols. The columns, wall sheathing, entrance lobbies, and stair treads are all of buff-colored Roman travertine marble. The floor is of pink Tennessee marble. The color scheme is the work of artist Jules Guerin. Defining the passage to the now-demolished concourse building are two free-standing columns topped by statues sculpted by New York artist Henry Hering. Allegories of "Day" and "Night," the statues are of Greek goddesses, one holding an owl, the other a rooster. Together they symbolize the motto of the railroads using the Union Station in 1925: "Service Around the Clock."

Monumentally scaled, cathedral-like waiting rooms were once common to all major metropolitan railroad stations throughout the country. Not only were they emblematic of the commanding presence in commerce and industry enjoyed by the railroad companies, but they also underscored for the traveler the dignity and ceremony that once attended railroad travel.

## ARCHITECTS

The Union Station complex was first the work of Graham, Burnham and Company (1913-1917). This was the company formed by Ernest Graham and the sons of Daniel Burnham after Burnham's death in 1912. Further plans and completion of construction was the work of their successor firm, Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. The latter firm became one of the leading architectural offices in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s.

Senior member of the firm was Ernest Robert Graham (1868-1936). A native of Lowell, Massachusetts, he received technical training at Coe College in Iowa and at the University of Notre Dame. Starting as a young draftsman at D. H. Burnham and Company, he became a partner in less than ten years. One of his early responsibilities was supervision of the construction of several of the buildings at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. A philanthropist as well as an architect, Graham donated funds for the erection of the Hall of Historical Geology at the Field Museum and he also presented to that institution his own extensive collection of ancient Egyptian Coptic textiles. His legacy continues in the Graham Foundation, which supports artistic and architectural endeavors, and which was created by his bequest.

Pierce Anderson (1870-1924) was educated at Harvard and John Hopkins University. On the advice of Daniel Burnham he attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and graduated in 1899. He joined D. H. Burnham and Company the following year. An especially skilled draftsman, he rapidly rose to chief designer and was head of the design department as partner in Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. He is particularly associated with the commissions the firm received outside of Chicago, most notably the Union Station in Washington, D.C. The most cosmopolitan of the four partners, Anderson was appointed by President Taft in 1912 to fill the vacancy on the Fine Arts Commission created by Burnham's death.

Both Edward Probst (1870-1942) and Howard Judson White (1870-1936) were native Chicagoans. The former was educated at public schools and at age 17 began architectural training in the office of Robert G. Pentecost. He joined D. H. Burnham and Company in 1898. A resident of River Forest, he was a prominent member of the Illinois Society of Architects, serving a two-year term as its director. Howard White was also educated in Chicago's public schools and received technical background at the Manual Training School. Entering Burnham's office at age 18 as a junior draftsman, he became a partner in the firm two years later.

Graham, Anderson, Probst and White were identified mainly with a commercial and corporate clientele. Their contribution to Chicago's building stock has been substantial and enduring. Among those most familiar are the Wrigley Building (1921); the Continental and Federal Reserve banks (1924); the Shedd Aquarium (1929); the Civic

Opera House (1929); and the Field Building (1934). Recognized nationally for their expertise in large-scale railroad station architecture, the firm also designed the Pennsylvania Railroad Terminal in Philadelphia, the Cleveland Terminal group, and Union Station in Washington, D.C.

## CONCLUSION

The name "Union Station" was often applied to railroad terminals to signify that they were the effort of city planners to consolidate several lines in one centralized location. Chicago's Union Station represented such an effort and thus was equipped to handle a staggering volume of traffic. In its heyday during the 1940s, the Union Station handled 300 trains and 100,000 passengers on a daily average, and this was well below its full capacity. The station was like a city in microcosm and its multitude of services included a 17-man police force, a volunteer fire department, a post office, a two-cell jail, two hospitals able to handle everything except X-ray and surgery, and a nursery for mothers and children, in addition to the usual drug store, shops, and restaurants.

Despite the advent of swifter and more economical transcontinental air travel, Union Station is still fully functional as a railroad terminal. Fortunately, neither the headhouse nor the waiting room has been materially altered since 1925. Union Station is the last remaining historically important and architecturally significant railroad terminal still in use in Chicago, one of the most important railroad hubs in the nation. (Of the seven passenger railroad terminals that once served the city, Union and Dearborn stations are the only remaining historic stations, and Dearborn Station is no longer used as a railroad terminal.) Transportation experts, architectural historians, and urban planners continue to acclaim Union Station as a model example of efficient planning and grand design.

## CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

In accordance with the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sec. 2-120-620 and -630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks can make a preliminary recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, or district if the Commission determines that it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that Union Station be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

### *Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City's History*

*Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.*

Union Station is the last-remaining great railroad terminal still in use in Chicago. Instrumental in the growth of the nation, the railroads were especially relevant in the

development of Chicago, the undisputed rail center of the United States during the period when both passenger and freight train service dominated the transportation industry.

Union Station is considered to be one of the most historically significant passenger railroad stations in the nation for its planning and grand architectural design. It was an outstanding achievement of railroad facility planning, consolidating several railroad lines in one centralized location equipped to handle a staggering volume of traffic.

Union Station was also an integral part of the landmark 1909 *Chicago Plan* of Daniel H. Burnham for the development of the Near West Side. A major historical document of city planning, the 1909 plan established standards of excellence for the urban environment which have influenced city planners up to the present.

***Criterion 4: Important Architecture***

*Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.*

Union Station is considered to be one of the oldest and most architecturally significant passenger train stations in the nation. Reminiscent of New York City's great Pennsylvania Station (demolished in the 1960s), the austere classicism of the station's exterior is marked by massive colonnades and porticos on all four sides of the building. The Great Hall (the main waiting room) with its vaulted skylight and connecting lobbies, staircases, and balconies, is considered to be one of the nation's great interior public spaces.

Union Station has been featured in numerous architecture books and periodicals. Union Station is the city's last-remaining great railroad terminal, a major architectural type of the modern age. Union Station is considered a masterpiece of railroad facility planning and design.

***Criterion 5: Important Architects***

*Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.*

Union Station is the work of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White, one of the most distinguished architectural firms in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s. Union Station is considered to be one of the finest examples of their work. (Graham, Anderson, Probst and White is the successor firm to D. H. Burnham & Co., one of the nation's most important architectural firms and one of the prime practitioners in the development of the Chicago School of Architecture.)

***Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature***

*Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City of Chicago.*

Union Station is a familiar downtown feature, an established visual landmark on the Near West Side visible from downtown streets as well as the river. The building's full-block site and distinctive monumental appearance are recognizable by Chicagoan and visitor alike, and the Great Hall remains one of the city's most famous interior public spaces, featured in numerous films and print advertisements.

***Integrity Criteria***

*The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.*

Union Station remains remarkably intact. The exterior of the building as well as the Great Hall are virtually unaltered from their historic appearance.

**SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES**

Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its preliminary evaluation of Union Station, the Commission staff recommend that the significant features be identified as:

- all **exterior elevations and rooflines** of the building, including the Jackson Street and Adams Street porticos and the internal vehicular drive/drop-offs; and
- all **interior features of the "Great Hall"** main waiting room, including but not limited to the vaulted skylight and ceilings, columns and walls, floors, and the allegorical statues of "Day" and "Night," and the principal **public spaces connecting and opening onto the Great Hall**, including the Canal, Jackson and Adams street entrances, stairs, lobbies and balconies.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### CITY OF CHICAGO

Richard M. Daley, Mayor

### Department of Planning and Development

Christopher R. Hill, Commissioner

James Peters, Deputy Commissioner for Landmarks

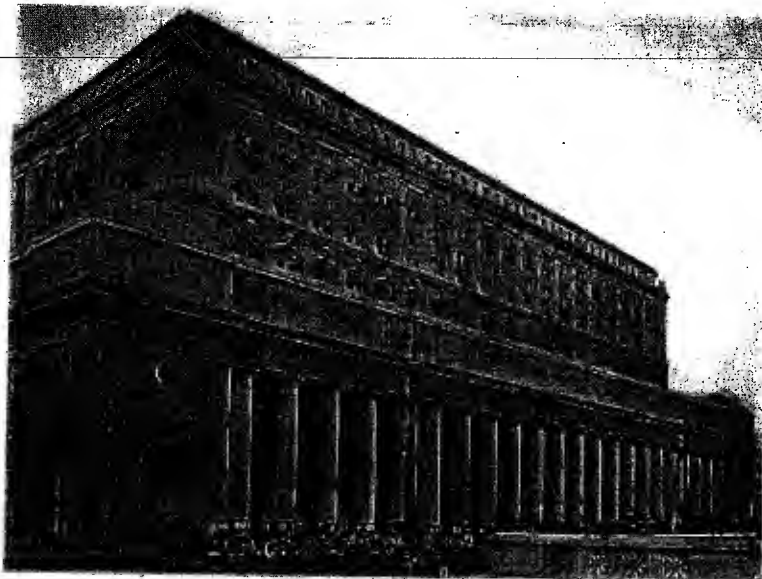
### *Project Staff*

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*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, Landmarks Division, 33 N. LaSalle Street, Room 1600, Chicago, Illinois 60602, 312-744-3200 (phone), 312-744-2958 (TDD), 312-744-9140 (fax), <http://www.ci.chi.il.us/landmarks> (web site).*

*This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation proceedings. Only language contained within the Commission's final recommendations to City Council should be regarded as final.*



**Union Station as it appeared in 1925. This view shows the main (Canal Street) facade from the southeast.**



**Union Station's exterior appearance has changed little since this 1985 photo of the Canal Street facade from the northeast.**

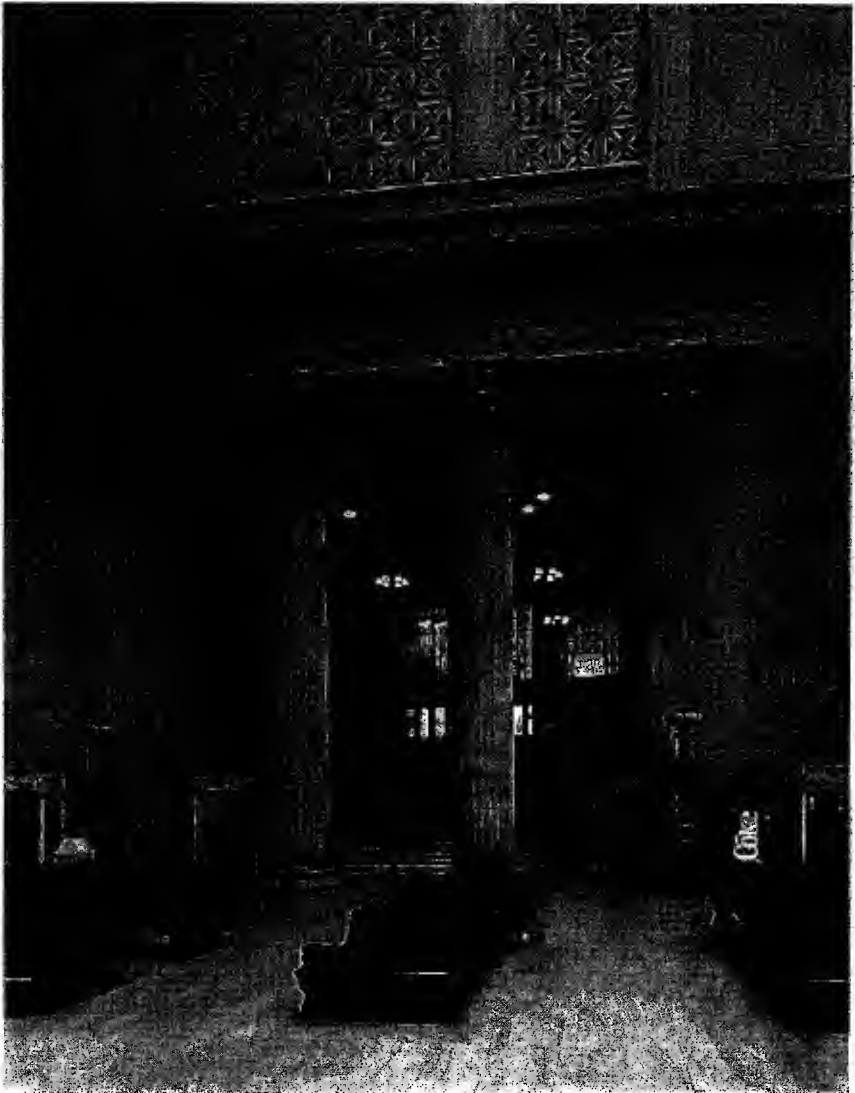




**Union Station's waiting room as it appeared in 1925, looking north from the south balcony.**



**The waiting room as it appeared in 1985, also looking north from the south balcony.**



**A 1985 photo showing the Beaux-Arts grandeur of the waiting room.**